

Q. In "When Did the Old Covenant End and the New Covenant Begin?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/newcovenantstart.htm>) you say that the New Covenant began at the Cross when Jesus died and His blood was shed. But several Scriptures in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion mention the Sabbath day after Jesus' death, and Luke 23:56 specifically says that the women "rested the sabbath day according to the commandment." Doesn't this mean that the Sabbath was in the New Covenant and that we should be keeping it today?

A. Sabbath keepers often point to references to the Sabbath in verses surrounding Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection as proof that the Sabbath command is still in effect. The passages in question are Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 23:54, 56; and John 19:31.

These verses show us that, even after Jesus' death, people continued to refer to the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath when fixing the days on which events took place. And yes, they also tell us that people, even Jesus' followers, continued to observe the Sabbath for some time. But from this evidence, can we conclude that we are supposed to be keeping the Sabbath today?

The argument behind the question posed is flawed because it assumes that Jesus' death would have instantly imparted the knowledge of the end of the Sabbath to Jesus' followers and all of the Jews keeping the Sabbath. The women, for example, would have to have miraculously realized that, because Jesus died on the Cross, they no longer had to

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rest on the Sabbath according to the Old Covenant command. But, of course, this did not happen.

From the biblical record, we learn that the disciples, far from suddenly having knowledge, were distressed and perplexed by Jesus' crucifixion (see, for example, Luke 24:13-31). Of course the women kept the Sabbath after Jesus' death. They knew of no reason why they shouldn't. No doubt Christians continued to keep the Sabbath for years after Jesus' death. They had to go through a learning curve. That's why Paul had to teach that Christians should show patience toward weaker brethren who esteemed one day as more important than another (Romans 14:1-6). But he also said, "Let no man therefore judge you in eating, or in drinking, or with respect to a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day, which are a shadow of the things to come; but the body is Christ's" (Colossians 2:16-17). We are not to let someone judge us by whether we keep a day. He wrote to the Galatians, who were being influenced to keep the Old Covenant law (Galatians 5:1-4), "You observe days, months, seasons, and years. I am afraid for you, that I might have wasted my labor for you" (Galatians 4:10-11).

It might also help to see that, just as Christians were slow to comprehend that the Sabbath day was not part of the New Covenant, so some Jewish Christians had trouble seeing that circumcision had ended with the New Covenant (Acts 15), and Peter did not see until Acts 10 that the New Covenant did away with unclean meats and ended the distinction between Jews and Gentiles.

The other references to the Sabbath mentioned after Jesus' death are simply time references. The day was called the Sabbath, whether it was still kept by Christians or not. Notice that John is particularly careful not to imply that the Sabbath is a Christian day, but was a day the Jews kept: "Therefore the Jews, because it was the Preparation Day, so that the bodies wouldn't remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a special one), asked of Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.... Then because of the Jews' Preparation Day (for the tomb was near at hand) they laid Jesus there" (John 19:31, 42). (By the way, John also labeled other Old Covenant feast days as Jewish. See, for example, John 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; and 11:55.) Even through the book of Acts, we find Paul evangelizing in the synagogues on the Sabbath. But this does not mean he was keeping the Sabbath. It merely means that he saw the meetings in the synagogues as opportune places to spread the Gospel.

So, does the Bible's mentioning the Sabbath after Jesus' death mean that the Sabbath is a part of the New Covenant? Not at all. What is important to see is that none of the New Testament writers ever commanded or taught anyone to keep the Sabbath or ever criticized or chastened anyone for breaking the Sabbath. And Paul specifically taught that the keeping of days was not important, we are not to allow anyone to judge us because we don't keep days (including Sabbaths), the keeping of days was only a shadow, and the Galatians' beginning to keep days so alarmed Paul that he thought he might have wasted his labor on them.

The only Sabbath for Christians is resting in Jesus Christ: "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Peter Ditzel